# DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER


(P70) Please return to Dpt

CONTENTS


| | |
|---|---|
| FILM RELATIONS WITH AMERICA | 61 |
| NOTES OF THE MONTH | 62 |
| THE SCHOOLS AND THEIR NEEDS, by John Robbins and A. H. Hanson | 63, 65 |
| NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS | 64, 72 |
| STATUS OF THE BRITISH DOCUMENTARY AND DISTRIBUTION IN THE U.S.A., by J. R. Williams | 66, 67 |
| THE CINEMA INDUSTRY IN BELGIUM DURING THE OCCUPATION, by Henri Storck | 68 |
| FILM SOCIETIES | 70 |
| CORRESPONDENCE (*G. Bellini*) | 70, 71 |



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# FILM RELATIONS WITH AMERICA

It is widely accepted that Anglo-American relations are not so good as they should be. Why is this? In our opinion the reasons are numerous but individually petty and of a kind which will respond to the healing efforts of the propagandist. There is no antagonism between the two countries which cannot be removed by a fuller understanding.

It is in the providing of this understanding that we submit with all respect that America has failed. Her propaganda has failed to present a conception of America which the European peoples can whole-heartedly welcome. No doubt there are concrete political and economic differences which may prove obstinate but these can be removed given a basis of sympathetic understanding.

No one will question the fact that the screen is the principal channel of communication between the peoples of America and the peoples of Europe and it is this channel which in our opinion is failing to present a picture of America which will bring understanding. We refer of course largely to the feature film. Too few American documentaries are exported to influence the great mass of cinema-goers—although, as we shall suggest later in this article, there may well be a partial solution to the present problem in an increase in the production and distribution of the American film of fact. Meantime American feature films are building up a conception of America in the minds of the European public which is false and damaging. Is it to be wondered that many British cinema-goers see America as a place of luxury and shallow sentiment? Whatever the immediate and ephemeral entertainment value, we believe that the crocodile tears shed in so many American war films, the hysterical abandon of the American family when it sees itself even mildly threatened by war, can arouse only astonishment and something close to contempt amongst audiences who have come to regard the deprivations of war as a daily commonplace. We do not hesitate to use such frank language because we know that the lath and plaster epics of the American home front completely misrepresent the truth about America. Rather do they represent a sickly-sweet commodity prepared solely for commercial profit, and with an irresponsible lack of attention to the deeper psychological values. Even their makers would resent the suggestion that they are attempting to present reality. But what may be entertainment in America can build in Europe the most dangerous illusions. If the screen were the only source of information on America the peoples overseas might well be forgiven for assuming that that great country is conceited, complacent and shallow, lacking in taste, true sensitivity and deep feeling.

It was not always so. There was a time when America brought to the screen not merely glittering and empty illusion, but the sense of a people struggling with the threats, the opportunities and the deep human excitements of the modern world. We could believe in the America of *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Fury*, *The Crowd*, *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, *A Man to Remember* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. We cannot believe in the America of *Since You Went Away*, *Tender Comrade*, *The War Against Mrs. Hadley*, and *Winged Victory*. The last film with its scenes of American airmen crying like small boys over their personal disappointments, must have aroused laughter as raucous in American Service canteens as in our own.

We are confident that a vast majority of American citizens knowing the facts would agree with our conclusions. But we believe that there are also a few Americans who could remedy the present situation but instead do nothing about it. We believe that those film executives and officials reponsible for the picture of the United States which reaches foreign screens are at considerable pains to prevent our receiving a complete account of American life, under the mistaken impression that to show hard reality is damaging to U.S. interests, is bad propaganda. We believe that there is a definite attempt to withhold films which might seem to indicate the existence in America of social problems and that this restriction has been allowed to reach a point where overseas audiences are left in some doubt as to whether America is so sugar-coated as to be immune from the laws of nature. It is not that we call for pictures of poverty and the class struggle. But when we hear that Mr. Riskin of the O.W.I. can announce proudly that American companies are co-operating with the Government to keep out of Europe films which O.W.I. considers unsuitable and that these unsuitable films are films *which show America in an unfavourable light*, are we beginning to discover why Robert Flaherty's film *The Land* and Pare Lorenz' *The Fight for Life* have not been made available in this country and why *The Oxbow Incident* was distributed almost in secret? There are rumours, too, that the O.W.I. would like to withdraw *The River* from circulation. Are such films dangerous simply because Mr. Flaherty and Mr. Lorenz are men who have refused to close their eyes to the fact that America belongs in the real world and that consequently an "unfavourable light" and not a holy halo does necessarily surround certain aspects of American life?

Surely these are the very aspects which are calculated to arouse the sympathetic understanding of peoples who are all too conscious


(*continued overleaf*)

of their own social problems—past, present and future. America is a country which has known unemployment, poverty and internal social stress, things which we in Europe understand. The true America is a country which can look fearlessly ahead, confident of overcoming the political and economic problems which lie before her. Indeed she will fight these problems with a vitality and confidence which may be harder to generate in the countries of the Old World. So let us be assured of it on the screen. Why should we see fleeting glimpses of real, unvarnished Americans only in such front-line documentaries as *The Fighting Lady* and *With the Marines at Tarawa*? Let documentary cameras be turned also on the citizens at home. Let us see the true Americans—not just tear-stained but immaculate war-widows in their fabulous kitchens, lost in the luxurious romanticism of war, but ordinary men and women who know what it's all about and know that the present catastrophe is not just a novelette which the Japs started with bombs on Pearl Harbour and which the Americans will finish with bombs on Tokyo. It is the full measure of our complaint against U.S. propaganda that it should be necessary to assure our more insular readers that Americans are really just as knowledgeable and intelligent as we are ourselves. To clinch that particular matter, let us finish by quoting from a letter written in a Pacific island foxhole and sent to *Time* by four American soldiers after a viewing of *Hollywood Canteen*—"It was as though we'd been taken into a millionaire's home, treated like uncouth fools to whom a debt was unfortunately owed, then sent back, dazed by the splendorous kindliness of the mighty, to our six-by-three lives. . . ."

# NOTES OF THE MONTH

### Our Backs to the Future

P.W.D. (Films) SHAEF was an opportunity of linking all that was best in British, American and French films. Instead it appears to have devoted itself to a damaging Anglo-Franco-American film trade war, with no holds barred. Its head is Mr. Sidney Bernstein, owner of an important chain of cinemas in greater London. He seems to have brought the outlook of a successful exhibitor of the old school into international film relationships.

One would have supposed that the personnel of P.W.D. (Films) SHAEF would have been selected from film men distinguished in their profession. In fact, the French were dismayed to find that the principal film representative in Paris was a Mr. Allan Byre, known there before the war as a film manager and salesman. He is listed in the latest edition of *Annuaire Général de la Cinématographie* we have been able to consult, as "Administrateur de la Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer". Mr. Byre is a man of integrity, and has served P.W.D. to the best of his ability, but his world is not the world of international cultural relationships; it was difficult for the French to appreciate that he was not really serving his old masters, and therefore impossible for them to give him the respect a Government servant is entitled to expect. One can hardly be surprised, therefore, that the department of Mr. Jean Painlevé, one of the most distinguished documentary and scientific film makers in Europe, and now the director-general of the Cinematographie Française, has been a little reserved.

In case it should be imagined that Mr. Byre's case is exceptional, it is necessary to add that Mr. Korda's one-time associate, Mr. Pallos, is the P.W.D. representative in Rome. It is rumoured that he has, no doubt through lack of political sense, started distribution negotiations with a renter powerful under Mussolini and who has since been put on trial for collaboration. Nor is it any secret that many of the P.W.D. film staff, representing Allied film interests, have been picked because of their continental commercial background. When one talks to some of them, it is apparent that their only interest is to regain their pre-war jobs in the continental Wardour Streets, which they hope will become as similar as possible to continental Wardour Streets before the war. The picture is an ugly one. The matter does not end with P.W.D. (Films) SHAEF. If it did, what has happened might have only been a short term policy disaster. But Mr. Bernstein is not only the head of P.W.D. (Films) SHAEF. He is also and simultaneously head of the section in the Films Division of the M.O.I. dealing with the production and distribution of films for liberated territory after P.W.D. (Films) SHAEF has passed on. True, Mr. Bernstein is under Mr. Beddington, but it is no secret that he is reluctant to accept the discipline of his director, with a consequence that there seems to be no prospect of a change of policy.

The position is clouded by little puffs of optimistic publicity. Were it not for the fact that it is strictly against the rules and etiquette of the Civil Service, one would almost imagine that Mr. Bernstein occasionally employs a press agent.

Matters are going from bad to worse, and something must be done to put them right. It is no answer to bleat out that a number of British feature films have been shown on the Continent. The Continent is starved of films, and it would have been disgraceful if such distribution had not been achieved.

So far we have dealt only with the production and distribution of British films for the Continent. What of the production of films on the Continent, for distribution here and overseas? Matters are nearly as bad. Films Division, near D-Day, was all of a tremble, and ambitious proposals for continental documentary films were made. In fact, very few units have been sent out of the country. Is this due to the fact that P.W.D. (Films) SHAEF withholds facilities, or even that Mr. Bernstein's section frustrates the ambition of the Division as a whole? Or is it Divisional policy to confine British film-making to our own backyard?

### Specialised Distribution

ONE OF THE most remarkable non-theatrical developments of recent years has been the conspicuous success of the technical film designed for exhibition to specialised audiences. For example, judged by the number of bookings, the M.O.I. film, *Neuro-Psychiatry* (retitled *Psychiatry in Action* in America) is the seventh most popular non-theatrical film in the United States in 1944, the first six being combat films including *Desert Victory*. *Psychiatry in Action* had been booked 1,974 times by December 31st, 1944, and 177 times in the first two months of 1945. Forty-five prints are in circulation and 17 copies have been sold to American organisations who make their own arrangements for exhibition. The film has also been borrowed by the U.S. Army and Navy for exhibition to their psychiatric services.

There seems to be no question that this type of film presents a new and valuable method of sharing British wartime experiences, and it is to be hoped that a programme of such films will be developed, both by the Government and by industry in the coming years. Provided that the films are objective, accurate and give credit fairly, they will enhance British prestige everywhere.

### John Robbins. Henri Storck

WE PUBLISH in this issue articles by John Robbins and by Henri Storck. John Robbins was amongst the most promising of the new young recruits to documentary. There was only time for him to begin his apprenticeship at Film Centre before he was called up and speedily commissioned. Then only a few months later he was killed in action. We shall never know what he might have contributed to the post-war story of documentary. Henri Storck is a Belgian pioneer of the film of fact. His deep hatred of social injustice he demonstrated in *Borinages*. Now he has suffered but survived the Nazi occupation. That he is once more able to speak out freely is a result of the contribution of John Robbins and the other young men who have died with him.

# The Schools and their Needs

## by John Robbins and A. H. Hanson

THE educational possibilities of the film are now generally recognised and, through the work of the documentary film movement have already been partly exploited. As yet, however, practically nothing has been done to plan the production of educational films for schools and to establish machinery for their distribution. Constructive thought on the subject is long overdue and has become vital now that our whole educational system is in the melting pot to be entirely recast.

Because it is such a powerful stimulant, the film must be used with discretion. Film shows must never become such a regular feature of the school curriculum that the pupils become doped with the screen. There is no danger of this at present but it may arise when educational films are more plentiful. Like all stimulants, the film can become a mere habit—a drug which, taken too often, has the opposite effect from the one intended. Each film must have its full value extracted before it is followed by another. It must be preceded by class discussion, so that the pupil knows how it fits in with the general scheme of instruction. It must be followed by further class discussion, while its effect on the imagination is still vivid, so that the essence of its message can be driven fully home, the questions that it raises considered at leisure, and the ideas that it evolves pursued and developed. In fact, it must provide the basis for creative thought and activity. Here, of course, the teacher comes into his own. He alone can ensure that the strong mental impressions are consolidated and that the film becomes not merely an isolated experience, soon to become hazy and diffuse, but a definite landmark in the intellectual development of each boy and girl who sees it.

### Teacher's Point of View

The technique of the film is not primarily the teacher's concern. He is interested, not in the technical problems of its making, but in its effectiveness as a medium of instruction. He alone can say whether it succeeds or fails. He is the link between producer and audience, a critic and adviser. In the last resort, it is his responsibility to see that the producer does his job properly and to stop any tendencies towards over-emphasis, excessive simplification, and unnecessary sensationalism which can easily arise from an artistic instead of a genuine educational approach. Fortunately, technique is no longer in the experimental stage. There is a basis of solid achievement on which to build. The combination of documentary photography, animated diagrams, cartoons, and terse informative commentary will form the basis of technique for educational film production. *Enough to Eat* with its original utilisation of the knowledge and personality of the expert, *Housing Problems* with its technique of realistic and authentic reporting, the M.O.I.'s *War in the East* with its brilliant use of animated diagrams and maps, *The Harvest Shall Come* with its combination of the documentary approach, dramatisation and use of actors, Mary Field's *Secrets of Life* series and many scientific films, show that the educational film has such flexibility and adaptability that there is virtually no subject or aspect of life that falls entirely outside its scope. In general, film technique, for people over fourteen, no longer constitutes a problem; what we need is a number of producers and directors, already experienced in the making of educational films, who will be prepared, in consultation with teachers and educationists, to adapt the established techniques to the specific needs of the various school subjects and of the different age-groups of pupils. It is obvious that a film dealing with a foreign language will be technically different from one dealing with mathematics, and it is also clear that no purpose will be served by showing to a class of six-year-olds a film adapted to the average intelligence level of the sixteen-year-olds. Particular care needs to be devoted to the production of films for the lower age-groups, as this will undoubtedly raise technical problems which, as yet, have hardly been considered. Neither these nor any other problems that arise should cause much difficulty at this stage, provided that there is the closest possible consultation and collaboration between the film-maker and the teacher. The establishment of partnership between the two is an essential requisite to the successful production of school films.

### On a National Basis

If the educational film is to be developed and popularised it is obvious that the whole business of production and distribution will have to be organised on a national basis. Production, on a scale to meet growing demands will require the services of an increasing number of State film units and of private units. These have greatly expanded during the war, through recognition by the Government of the importance of the film as a propaganda medium; and it should be possible in the very near future, to have at least a few units, both public and private, specialising in the production of school films. We should demand that, as soon as the situation makes it possible, many of the personnel now making Service training films should be given the opportunity to use their knowledge and experience in this new sphere, and that the Government should inform the private units now doing general propaganda work that peace will bring with it an expansion in the use of the educational film and that the need for their services will increase, not diminish, when the fighting stops.

At the first sight, the value of the film as an instructional medium would appear to vary considerably from subject to subject. In science and geography, for instance, it is obviously high, where as in English and mathematics it seems rather low. These differences in relative value, however, may be more apparent than real. Until further experiments have been made it is impossible to say which subjects can, or cannot, be translated into the film medium. In the meantime the requirements appear to be as follows:—

1. There is a need for a number of short films relating fundamental scientific principles, explained in a simple diagrammatic way, to the industrial processes, mechanical devices and common phenomena in which their operation can be observed; a collection of "Science and Everyday Life" films, adapted to various stages of the pupil's scientific education, made by experienced producers and supervised by a scientist who, like J. B. S. Haldane, combines encyclopaedic knowledge with a flair for popularisation.

(*continued on p.* 65)

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# NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

**Killing Rats.** *Production:* Crown Film Unit. *Direction:* Graham Wallace. 14 mins. Non-Theatrical.
*Subject:* How and why farmers must clear their farms of rats.
*Treatment:* One can almost imagine Pinewood rolling up its sleeves determined to prove that when it comes to making a simple technical film, explaining a process and punching home a propaganda point, Crown Film Unit has lost none of the cunning of the G.P.O. days. You are even given the chance for direct comparison between shooting done in 1940 for *Spring Offensive* and shooting done for this production. As a tribute to the consistent high quality of the camera work of this unit I defy you to tell the difference.

Excellent is the manner in which the dramatic tone, set by the title, is developed with a care unusual in a technical subject.

The first two-thirds of the film is excellent and I am sure will be most effective. Of the last third I am not so sure—it relies on social disapproval and I don't know that castigation converts the heathen.

Because the film will be principally road-shown the commentary is admirable for its high intelligibility though at times the commentator seems to lose interest in the process.

One small criticism: the pollution of foodstuff would seem to me better shown if the droppings were in the grain and not on the outside of the sack.
*Propaganda Value:* Excellent for its specialised purpose, this film is unusual in being equally good for arousing general interest in the problem. Further, it can be included in any agricultural programme as a first rate school film for all ages.

**Crofters.** *Direction:* Ralph Keene, *Camera:* Peter Hennessy. *Music:* Dennis Blood. *Assoc. Producer:* Edgar Anstey. M.O.I. 22 mins.
*Subject:* Life in a remote village in Sutherlandshire.
*Treatment:* Artful simplicity allied to a brilliant visual sense carry us into the heart of this Highland village. The shooting is magnificent and when the film is over we really do know something about the lives of the people. Fortunately the commentator carries most of the story and the voices of the villagers are not very much used, although when they are they seem to be amazed at their own lives. The camera work is lovely and the film has a neat musical score.
*Propaganda Value:* The crofters are for once shown as sensible human beings and not either epic characters battling against the forces of nature or as quaint old folk over-preoccupied with sheep and their problems.

**Future for Fighters.** *Production:* The National Film Board of Canada. *Canada Carries On Series.* 9 mins.
*Subject:* Canada's plans for demobilised servicemen.
*Treatment:* The style of this series *Canada Carries On* is well known. For the ordinary slow-witted Englishman the commentary requires either a translator or dialogue titles; it reflects the Marx Brothers' principle—"What you don't hear you don't miss".

Leaving the commentary then for each to absorb what he can, the visuals tell a moving story of men and women reunited after years of War. They show demobilised men being retrained and placed in lasting occupations, dwelling chiefly on farming and fisheries. As with some other films of demobilisation the rather unfortunate impression is given that most men will have to change their occupations after their period of national service—almost as if army life makes them too big for the pre-war jobs, in the same way that, according to *Future for Fighters*, it makes them too big for their pre-war clothes.

The members of the investigation boards which make financial grants towards the cost of farm or boat give the impression of men of integrity and fairness. There seems to be little niggling or cheese paring; but when the returned fighter has bought his farm and drives out, followed respectfully by "Hills, the Mover", to his new homestead, a sad ghost seems to lurk round the trim farmhouse. Perhaps it is a ghost from *Grapes of Wrath* recalling to mind all the bitterness of human migration—the breaking with old friends and forming new—the fading illusion of a new start. Perhaps, a murky ghost from Europe calling up a grim picture to be rebuilt in one reel; let's hope the venture of this returning fighter will succeed better than many an ex-soldier's farm between the wars.

To all appearances this film has been shot in the manner usual to the series—by several different directors and cameramen. The result is that the quality is patchy. Perhaps unintentionally there marches through the film a beauty parade of Canadian womanhood; all these shots are well photographed; for which small mercy many thanks.
*Propaganda Value:* Over here this film is bound to appear shallow as we are unable to fit it into the background of Canadian existence. In Britain, *Farms for Fighters* inevitably sounds like *Three Acres And a Cow*, but in one of the world's grain countries it must bear a different meaning. So in Canada it's a big promise and a promise that presumably can be kept.

**Student Nurse.** *Production:* G.B. Screen Services for the British Council.
*Direction:* Francis Searle. *Photography:* Brendan Stafford. 15 minutes.
*Subject:* A nurse's training from the time she goes into a hospital as a probationer until she qualifies.
*Treatment:* Here is a good looking, glossy, film. The hospital is magnificent, the nurses are pretty, there are flowers in the vases and the patients look as though they had never had a day's illness in their lives. The music sweeps along lushly, the camera work is rich and, at every moment, we expect to see Laraine Day and Lew Ayres in hurried consultation, as Lionel Barrymore appears at the end of the glistening corridor in his wheel chair. It's very definitely that sort of film and really nothing to do with nursing and sickness at all. No polishing, no scrubbing, no bed pans; just an impeccably starched and becoming cap and those cool, quiet hands we know so well. But, if you accept the Hollywood convention it is very well made in spite of the fact that it badly needs a pair of scissors.
*Propaganda Value:* Extremely good for the unthinking. If there is a vacant bed in that hospital this reviewer could do with a nice two months' stay, fresh flowers, sparkling eyes and all.

**Worker and Warfront No. 14.** Paul Rotha Productions. M.O.I. 10 mins. Non-Theatrical.
*Subjects:* (1) Typhoons firing rockets. (2) Rehabilitation of miners. (3) Itma.

Those who follow this series of bright magazine films distributed non-theatrically by M.O.I. will find this the best yet. It continues their steady progress.

The first item is a quick reportage of the assembly of the type of rockets used in our aircraft, followed by Service material from the camera gun of a Typhoon in action. The excellent cutting makes this a most exciting story which ends somewhat abruptly just as you are anxious to see the results of the rocketeering. The track would have been improved by omitting the repeated and finally irritating swishing noise which accompanies each individual rocket.

The second is the main item in the reel and displays very great care in direction and some first-class camera work. From the coal face an injured miner is taken in a shot or two—to the casualty hospital, where plaster encasement is used, and thence to the rehabilitation centre.

Here the friendliness and reassurance which the staff has managed to suffuse through the ornate marble palace of a local bourgeois comes over well. The fun of the recuperative exercises almost carries you to the point of joining in.

Then for a bewildering moment you are swept into a scene between a union official and a group of miner-patients. With every passing frame you expect the dirt to be spilt, as the union "Boss" (complete with car) persuades the miners it's a good thing to collaborate with the employers

(*continued on p.* 72)

*SIGHT and SOUND*

A cultural Quarterly

MONTHLY FILM BULLETIN

appraising educational and entertainment values

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## *Schools and Their Needs*

(*continued from page* 63)

2. Geography demands a series of regional studies, with animated diagrams and maps, designed to illustrate such things as the location of industries, distribution of natural resources, relative density of population, characteristics of various climatic zones, lay-out of trade routes, interdependence of industrial and agricultural regions and general peculiarities of life characteristic of the various parts of the world.

3. In both science and geography the problem is simply one of applying to the specific needs of the school a technique which is already well developed. The case is very different with history, which offers a big field for the production of school films, but which as yet has been very little explored. Obviously the film can be of immense value in giving that reality to the past which the average pupil finds such difficulty in envisaging through verbal descriptions of teachers and textbooks. Social and economic history possibly offer the material upon which existing techniques can be employed most easily and effectively. For younger children we should like to see a series of short films dealing with the development of various aspects of material culture, such as housing, transport, food production and dress, from the earliest times to the present day. We should also welcome a film on the Industrial Revolution; with lavish expenditure and great care in production the film can be used to bring a whole historical epoch to life. Normally, the most effective way of doing this is through the biography of some famous person. Commercial film companies have achieved something in this direction, but unfortunately most of the efforts, however admirable they may be artistically, are educationally almost valueless. If the screen biography is to be of any use, it must stick closely to the facts, give far more attention to the public rather than the private life of the subject, and indulge in sensationalism only when the events themselves are of a genuinely sensational character. *The Young Mr. Pitt*, *Lady Hamilton*, *Suez*, *Disraeli*, *Penn of Pennsylvania* are definitely *not* the kind of historical film the schools require. *Pasteur*, *The Magic Bullet*, *Alexander Nevsky*, and *Marshal Suvorov*, represent a much more accurate approach to the subject.

4. The Teaching of English offers less exciting prospects; but nevertheless we can think of at least one "English" film which is just crying out to be made—a full-length feature showing the development of stagecraft and dramatic technique from the Greek Theatre to the present day.

5. The film has been little used in the teaching of modern languages, apart from the G.B.I. experiments. This is rather surprising as the subject offers no technical difficulties. All that is necessary is to make a number of little dramas and conversation pieces, adapted, in respect of speed and vocabulary, to the stage which the pupil has reached. Each film could be preceded by an explanation of the more difficult words and phrases, and followed by a questionnaire designed to make sure that the pupils understood what the characters were saying.

6. Art and music also offer easily-realisable opportunities. An excellent film could be made to illustrate the development of architecture. Children could be made familiar with the instruments of the orchestra, and the analysis of large-scale musical works could be made by critics working in collaboration with leading orchestras and individual performers.

These are just a few of the possibilities, in respect of established school subjects, which the development of the educational film opens out before us. Great as these possibilities are, however, the film has an even more important part to play. After the war no school must be allowed to neglect the latest-developed aspect of education—*training for citizenship*, and here the film has already proved its worth. An industry which has produced *The Nutrition Film*, *The Londoners*, *Children at School*, *North Sea*, *The Harvest Shall Come*, *World of Plenty*, and many other excellent interpretations of national and international affairs, should have no difficulty in making films which would give the school-child a most living picture of the realities of his social environment, a genuine feeling of responsibility for what is happening in the world, and a knowledge of how, when vested with citizen's powers, he can act effectively. Our social life has become so complicated, and the field of democratic action so wide that only films such as these can give the average citizen an imaginative grasp of his place in the scheme of things and of the possibility of his *doing something* which may influence and control the great impersonal machine in which he feels himself caught up. If "citizenship" films are to become acceptable to education committees they must be free from party propaganda yet vigorous and creative in their interpretation of facts.

The way ahead for the educational film is clear enough, but a great deal of propaganda work must be done if the authorities are to be persuaded to act quickly. That propaganda must be organised with the greatest possible vigour, starting *now*. The first thing is to convince the teachers, the training college staffs, the inspectors and administrators. When that is achieved the Board of Education will find itself subjected to a concerted pressure which will be difficult to resist.

## *Book Review*

**Presenting Scotland.** Norman Wilson. Edinburgh Film Guild, 21 Castle Street. 2/–.

*Presenting Scotland* has an introduction by Norman Wilson, an excellent selection of stills, and an iconography of films made about Scotland. The introduction and stills make the book of interest to the general reader, while the list of films is valuable to those studying the history and development of the cinema.

Mr. Wilson's thesis is that, in the nineteenth century, Scottish prestige was supported all over the world by the novels of Sir Walter Scott. The cinema age, by placing the centres of film production outside Scotland, has deprived her of a method of expression of great value. For this reason, he suggests, the documentary film is of paramount importance in the North. He recommends the revival of the Films of Scotland Committee which was responsible for a notable series of films before the war. Wilson argues that a country which has produced such documentary film men as John Grierson and Harry Watt is surely capable of supporting film units

(*continued on p.* 68)


# I.C.I. *Film Productions*

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*Mastitis*
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*From the SCHOOL SCIENCE SERIES:*

*Water*
*Water Cycle*

*THIS IS COLOUR*
*(A Technicolor film about the British Dyestuffs industry and the nature and use of colour)*

*THE HARVEST SHALL COME*
*(A sociological film about the British agricultural worker)*

*With the exception of This is Colour (in 16 mm. only) these films are in 35 mm. and 16 mm. sizes. All are Sound films.*

***All the above are available through the Central Film Library, to which applications for loan should be made.***

ICI

Other films in production will be announced when completed.

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# Status of the British Documentary

By J. R. Williams

*Head of Non-Theatrical Section, Film Division, British Information Services, New York*

THE prestige of British documentaries has, of course, stood high for many years wherever, in America, there is keen interest in the more serious uses of film. Prestige and circulation do not always go hand in hand, however, and it is probably fair to say that up to the beginning of the war a *succès d'estime* amongst the documentarians was all there was to compensate for a general lack of knowledge of British films amongst the American non-theatrical public, and a vague impression, derived from theatrical circles, that all British films were bad. When, therefore, the British Information Services tentatively began to distribute M.O.I. documentaries as part of their job of acquainting America with the nature of the British war effort, their situation was something like that of a yacht sailing against a strong current with the aid of a fair following wind. We have moved a good way upstream since then, but fundamentally I believe the situation is still the same. The general atmospheric conditions under which our progress is made, however, have changed a good deal.

When Richard Ford began to develop B.I.S. distribution from New York, America was not at war, and peacetime conditions obtained in the 16-mm. market. These peacetime conditions are predominantly commercial. The dealers, of whom there are vast numbers, buy films either for re-sale at a substantial profit or for renting on such terms as will recoup the print cost in anything from twelve to thirty bookings. Alongside the dealers, there are the educational film libraries (run by universities, colleges or local education authorities) which also buy and rent films. Some of these libraries operate very much as the dealers do, renting films to all comers, though their interest is naturally biased towards groups whose work has some kind of adult educational flavour. Other libraries operate within the closed circle of a state or municipal school system, and others again do not extend their activities much beyond the field covered by the college or university to which they belong.

### 20,000 Sound Projectors

These dealers and educational libraries make up an enormous distribution network—when the Office of War Information began to distribute 16-mm. films, it found 250 of them worthy to be its agents. The field they serve is equally enormous. It is estimated that there are 20,000 sound projectors in public or institutional buildings in the U.S.A. Texas alone claims to have a thousand.

A high proportion of these projectors are in schools and colleges, and alongside this vast technological development has gone the progress of educational experiment in the use of films. Departments of audio-visual education have been set up by universities, colleges, and school authorities all over the country, the normal practice being for these to be equipped with every facility for storing, shipping, servicing and showing films. Last summer, forty-seven educational institutions in twenty-one States offered courses in audio-visual education.

It must not be imagined that this vast distribution machinery is a kind of insatiable maw which even the films of all the nations of the world might well leave unfilled. The school market is much the biggest section of the whole. It is this market which the dealers comb most assiduously. There is a huge number of films made for it, some of them, notably those of Encyclopedia Britannica Films Inc. (formerly ERPI) being cut and tailored to the curricula with a very exact knowledge of their requirements. The last edition of the *Educational Film Catalog* listed over three thousand films, most of them American, and many of these are suitable for adult organisations, as witness the inclusion of quite a few of our own titles.

### War Films

Operating in a non-belligerent America, against this commercial and educational background, the British Information Services began in 1940 to offer British war films to the American public on the only terms that would have been tolerated at the time. The films were sold and rented at prices conforming to U.S. commercial practice. On America's entry into the war, however, the picture changed. The Office of War Information began to produce and adopt films for non-theatrical distribution. Prints of these were placed free with the dealers and libraries, who accepted full responsibility for developing distribution at nominal service charges very much below the old commercial rates. Substantially this is the situation which still exists. Though the O.W.I. suffered a severe cut in its budget in 1943, it has contrived to keep its machinery in being as a means of distributing films paid for by other agencies. At the same time, the War Department and the Navy Department have both set up schemes under which "incentive" films, chiefly battle subjects, are lent to war factories (again at very low charges) and the very large distribution which has been achieved in this field is the chief adult counterpoise to the heavy school distribution.

Soon after the establishment of the O.W.I. non-theatrical schemes in 1942, it became apparent that it would no longer be possible to distribute British war films at commercial rates—indeed, the actual circulation secured on commercial terms was never very large. The O.W.I. had set a pattern which borrowers approved. They began increasingly to protest against rental charges on war films, and when the O.W.I. adopted British films for its non-theatrical scheme (*Target for Tonight*, *Listen to Britain* and *Dover* were eventually so adopted) the anomaly became unsustainable. From the autumn of 1942, therefore, the B.I.S. films were loaned at nominal service charges and the sale prices were dropped to a minimum level.

At the same time, following a plan made by Tom Baird during his visit to the United States in 1942, the system was begun of decentralising the work by establishing additional loan libraries outside New York. As the system now stands, there are six main libraries, with a Film Officer in charge of each, and at seventeen other points there are libraries (less complete but thoroughly representative) under the charge of British Consulates. In this way, the whole of the States are covered, each library serving a definite area. At practically all these distribution points, the films are housed and shipped by American 16-mm. distributors, who in most cases assist the British office in the work of promotion. The extent of their assistance is a widely varying quantity. In some cases it amounts to no more than an occasional verbal recommendation to customers; in some it is a vigorous collaboration.

In terms of the country we are working in, this is a very modest organisation, and it looks very small beside the corps of 250 professional or educational distributors who handle films for the O.W.I., or the massive organisation by means of which the U.S. War Department promotes the showing of its films in war factories. Neither can our bookings compare with those of American agencies. It is not to be expected that foreign films should have the same interest for the American people as the productions of their own country. The more deeply America becomes involved in the war, the more is this true. In the days when Britain stood alone, *London Can Take It* could electrify a country which, for all its neutrality, was deeply shaken by the spectacle of Fascist advance; and in 1941, *Target For Tonight* shone like the first-risen star. But the growth of American war films, which have rapidly improved in quality as well as quantity, has naturally transformed the market.

Nevertheless, through the indomitable persistence of our officers, we have reached an extraordinary variety of organisations. What is more, such analyses as we have been able to make show pretty clearly that we have avoided the pitfall which even American war film distribution has not altogether escaped—the overemphasis on schools. These, with their wealth of projectors, are the line of least resistance for the professional distributor. As he concentrated most of his sales drive on them in peacetime, so he turned first to them when he became a distributor for the O.W.I. Our own officers have frequently been reminded that our main job is one of informing the adult population, and the reports show how loyally they have gone after the more difficult game. Adult organisations of all kinds figure amongst our borrowers—civic groups, religious bodies, trade unions, professional organisations, government agencies and the armed services. Factories are amongst our best customers.

### Distribution Areas

Our chief distribution is, naturally, around the great centres of population—New York, Chicago, Detroit, Boston and the other great industrial cities of the east, though Los Angeles has, not unnaturally, always been one of our fertile spots, and the distribution in Washington, where so many government agencies are centred, has a special importance. Apparently, however, there is no spot so out-of-the-way that one of our films may not creep into it at some time. Army Education Officers have carried prints to the lonely outposts of Alaska, the Department of Agriculture has congratulated us on the effect of our farming films in a Spanish-speaking village of New Mexico, and *Neuro-Psychiatry* has been circuited with great success throughout the Hawaiian Islands by the Regional Health Department. These are Rembrandtian highlights, however, and should not be allowed to produce the illusion that the whole picture is one of brilliance and light.

The job of finding out what sort of British film is of interest to the American non-theatrical

# and Distribution in the U.S.A.

world has, indeed, been an arduous one, proceeding over the bumpy ground of trial and error. The films that have been outstandingly successful fall within a rather narrow range. First it was A.R.P. films in the months following Pearl Harbour, when there were no American films on the subject, and the possibility of air attack on one or both coasts could not be dismissed. Since then, most of the winners have been combat films and of these, the two most successful—*Target For Tonight* and *Desert Victory*—were theatrical films in the first place. The cry for films from the war fronts is, indeed, always the loudest. It is perhaps natural that the War Department should provide little else but battle pictures in its programme of "incentive" films for war factories, but the same taste goes right through, even to the schools.

**Target for Tonight**

*Target For Tonight* is so far our only long-lived film. After its successful theatrical run, it was released for non-theatrical showing before the American production of war films had got under way and there was an instant demand for it. The O.W.I. made 130 prints at its own expense and sold 100 more. We sold over 100 ourselves, and 40 prints in our libraries were kept constantly busy. The film was soon reported to be the most heavily booked non-theatrical subject in the U.S.A. and it kept its outstanding popularity for over a year. Its success was the theme of all 16-mm. dealers' conferences, and the Educational Film Library Association might almost be said to have founded its existence on a calculation as to what might be done with a succession of "Targets".

When *Desert Victory* emerged in 16 mm. there were many more rivals in the field, and the sale of prints was not so great, but it soon established record figures at our loan libraries. Nearly 50,000 showings of our own prints have been reported, and we gave the O.W.I. 100 prints which have probably produced many thousands more showings.

Lately there has been a run on the "Act and Fact" films, a series of one-reelers produced in New York under general directions from Tom Baird, and made from topical British newsreel material. *D-Day*, *Cherbourg* and *The Road to Paris* in turn raised the spirits of our Film Officers, who must have occasional quick bookers to keep up their morale. The films are obviously well justified from the point of view of the British Information Services, since they help to put over the story of Britain's achievements; but as they are made in American style by a Canadian editor and commentated by an American voice, they are not quite relevant in a discussion of how to win appreciation for British films in the U.S.A., unless you subscribe to the despairing theory that all British films should be remade for America by Americans.

It is reassuring to note that, of the important non-combat films, two have achieved a distinctive record. *World of Plenty* was at once recognised in leading non-theatrical circles and was backed by the Educational Film Library Association. We sold outright 75 prints (which is good for a film of this kind, though not as good as we had hoped) and our own libraries have recorded nearly 2,000 showings. More surprising than this was the success of *Psychiatry in Action* (American title of *Neuro-Psychiatry*). When it was found that the film was almost invariably well received when shown, our field officers began to comb all the psychiatric and rehabilitation circles. An extraordinary array of organisations have used the film—rehabilitation agencies, medical groups, hospitals, mental hygiene associations, health authorities, college psychology groups, etc.—and its life is far from ended. This looks like the right solution to the problem of how to use a highly specialised film. and it is a good augury for international film relations of the future.

Other successes of this kind have been on a smaller scale. Too many specialised subjects are viewed with interest by the leading officers of the appropriate organisations or government agencies, are praised, perhaps briefly reviewed in a specialist journal, shown a few dozen times and forgotten. We shall probably learn a good deal more about the way to handle these films, but the difficulties must be recognised.

The chief value of a specialised film usually lies in its explicit teaching. Now it is certainly not Britain's business to hold up her own techniques as examples to other countries. In any case, specialists are often reluctant to promote the use of a film if the techniques illustrated differ in some essentials from those they approve. We have had countless examples of this. Midwives, frowned on in the U.S.A., were a fatal flaw in *Mother and Child*. The C.I.O. were friendly to Stanley Hawes' *Partners in Production* but could not formally endorse it because the discussions of the pit committee looked like an encroachment on the preserves of the trade union; one expert even regretted that *A Start in Life* was marred by a heretical lesson in nose-blowing (U.S. theory says both nostrils should be blown at once). Films have to carry such handicaps, even at home, but abroad they are more serious because they heighten the effect of strangeness. No wonder the first reaction of many an American specialist, when he sees a good British film on his subject, is something like Beethoven's "I like your opera; I think of setting it to music". In specialist provinces which are already well supplied with excellent and appropriate American films (farming, for example) it is very difficult to secure attention for ours. But we must peg away, because our job is part of the general job of promoting in all nations a livelier interest in each other's affairs and a spirit of eager exchange of ideas. *Psychiatry in Action* has shown that where this spirit exists the way is not so steep or stony.

**Failures**

The number of M.O.I. films which have fallen dead here, however, suggests that there is much to be learned by producers and directors as well as by distributors. Sometimes a failure is nobody's fault. It may be the very perfection and intimacy of the Englishness of a film which makes it unexportable. *The Harvest Shall Come*, for example, though it aroused the sympathetic interest of the Department of Agriculture here, dropped like a stone when it was tried on their agricultural circuits. In such cases there is no help for it. Some of our masterpieces we shall have to be content to keep, like our Wordsworths and our Elgars, at home. But it would be a counsel of despair to take this attitude to the whole issue.

The problem of what are the qualities in British films which make for success or failure in America does not take the same form (fortunately) in the non-theatrical field as in the theatrical. Anyone who wants to understand either field, however, must first get rid of the notion, natural to those who talk cheerfully of "our American cousins", that a background of vague benevolence towards Britain is a normal feature of American life. A perusal of Part IV of William Dwight Whitney's pellucidly sane little Guild book *Who Are The Americans?* will quickly remove such a complacent notion and explain why it is that a buried resentment against England still smoulders, ready to flare up at a puff of wind, in many parts of America.

**Indifference . . . even hostility**

This being so, the distributor of British films in the U.S.A. must count on at best a massive indifference, and at worst a suspicion or even hostility towards his products, in many quarters. Some of the leading M.O.I. films just caught a favourable tide and had a marvellous passage. *Target For Tonight* rode out on the wave of admiration for British pluck and endurance which was sweeping over the country. *Desert Victory*, in America as in England, had the good luck to arrive just as all attention was focused on the second phase of the last African campaign. Both these films, after their theatrical réclame, came into the category of famous feature films which people wanted to see again (or for the first time) in 16 mm. These fortunate considerations should be remembered when one is tempted to say that a film only needs to be good enough to makes its way in America as well as at home. And since many films are good and important which no one would mock with the word masterpiece, and very few films are lucky enough to be launched with such favourable winds behind them as those which blew the two great combat pieces to fame, the amount of apathy we encounter in America should not surprise anyone.

Indifference or resistance very often express themselves in the form of objection to British sound-tracks—especially as reduced to 16 mm. It is good to learn from Ken Cameron that direct recording on 16 mm. is likely to bring the technical quality of Crown films up considerably in the near future; but sound recording is only one part of an extremely complicated problem. The trouble really begins before the sound flows into the microphone.

The first and obvious point is that we are dealing with a public which has not been attuned to English speech as British audiences have been familiarised with American speech by Hollywood. Moreover, American speech in public is not only different from ours, it is louder, more emphatic, and often, one may concede, clearer. The bold style of *The March of Time* has a unique colour in England, but its significance in America is that it is a stylisation of the country's customary methods of public announcement. Ears attuned to such a bold and vigorous manner of public speech simply will not register the vibrations of some of our more modest speakers, and their charming off-handedness misses the point.

When it comes to dialogue, the old dilemma of documentary—whether to use trained actors

(*continued on p.* 69)

# The Cinema Industry in Belgium during the Occupation

## By HENRI STORCK

*Well-known Belgian documentary director, maker of* Borinages *who has lived in Belgium throughout the Nazi occupation*

BEFORE the war, arising from the poor sense of discipline of the cinema owners and film distributors, the cinema industry in Belgium suffered from a general lack of professional organisation. The representatives of American firms wielded considerable influence amongst the distributors and pursued a policy in accordance with their own personal interests. It was true that two large associations had been formed, that of the distributors, and that of the exhibitors (the latter formed in 1938), but behind a façade of organisation there was precious little understanding and as a result, it was impossible for effective measures to be taken.

Weakness was particularly marked on the exhibiting side. There were too many cinemas (about 1,100 for a population of 8½ million) and, most important, the cinemas were too large, with too great a seating capacity. In fact there was one seat per 16 of the population (in Brussels there were several cinemas seating 3,000). Before the war there were too many competitive attractions. The cinema owners fought with each other by issuing complimentary tickets, reducing the charges for seats, which became fantastically cheap, and by including two or even three big films in the same programme. Added to this, the high taxes and royalties augmented still further the exhibitors' costs.

Thus the general situation of the cinema was extremely bad when the Germans invaded Belgium in May, 1940. They established a military administration whose propaganda department (called the Propaganda Abteilung) was to concern itself with the artistic and intellectual life of the country. It appears that the film section of the P.A. got its orders direct from the Propaganda Ministry in Berlin. It was to carry out the plans of the secretary of the Reichsfilmkammer Karl Melzer, also secretary of the *Chambre International du Film*. This organisation grouped together all the occupied countries and certain neutral countries such as Sweden, Portugal and Spain, as well as Germany's allies. Herr Melzer's objective was to allow only German films to be shown in Belgian cinemas and to eliminate all other productions. Since Germany produced only 100 new films per year, it was necessary to close a large number of cinemas and the aim was to retain 500 of the 1,100 exhibiting before the war. A start was made by cutting out all those cinemas whose receipts did not exceed 5,000 francs a week and those backed by political parties such as the Catholic and the Socialist cinemas. The occupying authority did not manage to close all the cinemas intended, but cut the number down to 794. On the other hand it encouraged the opening of 87 halls for the showing of 16 mm. films. Melzer's plan resulted also in the shutting down of a large number of distributors who had become troublesome; out of 90 distributors, 12 only were finally authorised to carry on with their work, while the others were arbitrarily shut down.

The object of Melzer's plan was to monopolise all income for the benefit of the German cinema industry and to produce intensive pro-German propaganda. In point of fact, although Belgian cinemas should have shown German films exclusively this was not fully achieved, eight-tenths of all films shown in Belgian cinemas during the occupation being of German origin.

The first regulations issued by the military authority made it compulsory for the distributors and exhibitors to register with the associations recognised by the Germans. Following this, all English, American and French films were banned. Later on, a few French films were allowed so that the needs of the cinema could be met. German newsreels were shown compulsorily in the proportion of 3 per cent, reduced towards the end of the occupation to 2 per cent. Other regulations were added subsequently, in particular each member of the industry was compelled to prove his Aryan descent. The showing of French films in the Flemish regions of the country was prohibited; in these regions the Propaganda Abteilung allowed only German films or French films dubbed in German. Thus the people of Antwerp were only able to hear their favourite French stars talk German, a handicap that was particularly offensive! In Brussels, German films were shown in the original with French and Flemish captions or else dubbed in French. In the Walloon region, in face of the lack of success of the original German versions, only German films dubbed in French were shown. Since German production was going down each year, while the market was increasing (indeed, with travelling and holidays impossible, the theatre, concerts and the cinema were about the only distractions for the Belgians during the occupation), the Germans imported a few Italian and French films. These last had been made in Paris by the German film *Continental* or purchased by *Continental* from independent French producers.

In addition the Germans bought cinemas in several towns and used them to launch their big productions, boosting them with extensive publicity.

Altogether, over 300 films were imported from Germany and distributed by the *U.F.A.* and *Tobis* agencies, who thus managed to divert to Germany something in the region of half a million francs.

To complete the picture, it must be added that the Germans made it compulsory for the distributors to give them a list of the film copies they held, and these copies had to be handed over to be made into raw materials. Many masterpieces, particularly of the silent film period, were lost in this way. The Germans took not the slightest account of the artistic or historic value of certain valuable films which were foolishly handed over to them by faint-hearted distributors. However, some copies of American films were hidden away and escaped destruction; they were brought out and shown on our screens immediately the Germans had gone, and were enormously successful with a public that had been deprived of American and British films for four years.

It must be stressed that the compulsory showing of newsreels and the large number of German films shown have not had the slightest effect on Belgian morale, nor on the spirit of resistance, Many patriots refused to go and see German films. For the most part, these films didn't go down at all with the public. With a few exceptions, German production had lost all its particular style; its ambition was to imitate American commercial production, but the scenarios lacked imagination and the direction was completely uninspired. Production was rigidly controlled, with a consequent loss of the creative and inventive spirit. Considered as a whole, German film work was heavy, slow and sombre; the humour was laboured. There were, however, a very few interesting films, some on war subjects and some based on the lives of historical or legendary figures, as for instance a fantasy in Agfacolour inspired by the adventures of Baron Munchausen; but under Nazi influence German films had lost their special qualities of plastic beauty and sharp realism. The public reacted to the Nazi newsreels with spirit. The occupying authority had been forced to prohibit demonstrations, making the cinema manager responsible for all incidents. Some especially provocative newsreels, such as those showing Leon Degrelle haranguing his Rexist, "anti-bolshevik" legion, had to be shown with the lights on so that interruptors could be more easily spotted. On one occasion, however, it was a German officer who started the laughing and the whole audience was quick to imitate him.

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## Presenting Scotland (*contd. from p.* 65)

within its own border.

Though full reference is made to Grierson in the introduction, it is surprising that *Drifters* does not appear in the list of films about Scotland. The list is unselective and therefore uncritical. It includes not only good films but some which are better forgotten—for example, a silly little British Council film, *Land of Inventors*, peppered with errors of fact, and the almost worse British Council film—*Royal Mile, Edinburgh*—calculated to make every Scotsman from Robert the Bruce to Sir James Barrie turn twice in his grave.

# *Status of the British Documentary*
## *—(continued)*

who can articulate but smack of the theatre, or real people who are obviously authentic but are almost unintelligible—comes up in a more acute form than ever when you have an overseas audience in mind. In spite of the success of this experiment in *Children of the City*, no one wants directors to make a habit of circumventing the problem by using a commentator to summarise all the dialogue, but a more careful choice of speakers (and of what they are allowed to say) is the obvious and only road to success in America. It is not only dialect-speakers who are a source of difficulty (indeed it is to be hoped documentary will yet solve the question of how to convey to audiences both at home and abroad some of the authentic flavour of a really good dialect speaking); the clipped speech of a naval commander or a flight-lieutenant is just as likely to be unintelligible here as the burr of a Cornish farmer.

The problem does not consist merely of technical elements of this kind, however. The unexpected success all over America which we have had with *Psychiatry in Action*, in spite of the inaudibility of so many of its lay speakers, shows that much lost detail will be forgiven if the main drift is clear and the matter is of great importance and appropriateness. The resistance to British films is, in fact, largely to be explained in psychological rather than auditory terms.

It is not, after all, surprising that America should not be keenly interested in the more homely forms of British self-communing. Those tricks of dwelling lovingly on our own foibles, those family jokes and group symbols (such as the pub—still fondly believed in Bloomsbury to be the social centre at which all community problems are thrashed out)—how can we expect these to cut much ice away from home? Even an Englishman cannot rid himself of the uneasy feeling that self-complacency has been creeping into the films lately. It is a commodity very difficult to export (as the Americans, too, are discovering if I may judge by the expressive silence with which some British audiences received *The Town* and *Swedes in America* at shows I attended during my recent visit to England).

### British Styles of Speech

A note of self-complacency, however, breeds no more than indifference in an audience. What is more serious is the hostility aroused in this country by certain British styles of speech, accents, intonations and inflections. It is not only the trade union leader who will say "our fellows have an anti-Eton complex"; the dislike of anything like a "superior" tone of voice runs right through America. In some cases, many of us would concur with American judgment, but it was a surprise to me to hear the coaxing tone of *Mass Radiography* described as "patronising" by a New York doctor. This particular term of condemnation, however, has been applied to more than one M.O.I. film in America. The reaction is one which cannot be ignored.

Again, our celebrated understatement is well-known to the intellectuals over here, but it is regarded as something rather odd and eccentric. In a country where self-confidence is no more than good manners, where dramatic emphasis is the tone of everyday conversation, and a buoyant optimism is, as it were, the national symbol, understatement is not regarded as heroic. It is more likely to be regarded as a pose. Perhaps it is.

It is a naive answer to all this to say "we are as we are, and the Americans must take us or leave us". The romantic notion that works of art take shape inevitably as expressions of the soul, and are innocent of all thought of an audience, will hardly hold water for a neurasthenic lyric, let alone a film. A film addresses people. Either American people are amongst those addressed or they are not. If they are, then this must surely be one of the factors governing the mode of address.

Those of us who live for some time in America usually learn to express ourselves so as to be understood by Americans. At first, misunderstandings are the rule, and offence may be given unwittingly. But eventually, without ceasing to be an Englishman, one learns to modify's one's idiom and inflection so as to *convey* what one means, and not merely to express it to one's own private British satisfaction.

### Better Articulation

I believe that documentary must learn some of the lessons which individuals learn. No one wants directors to imitate those popular novelists who study the American market and then proceed to write whatever will best sell in it. But an adjustment to your audience is not incompatible with integrity and honesty. No doubt a delicate flair is the best guide. It is not suggested that controlled reaction-tests, and pseudo-scientific word-screenings will solve the problem or that the practice of some kind of cinematic eugenics will lead to the production of ocean-crossing films. The fundamentals are too subtle and complex for that, and must be dealt with by the the equally subtle and complex mechanism of intuition. Intelligence, however, can be a useful ally of intuition. It was no doubt a natural flair which enabled Leslie Howard to become a popular American actor, whilst never losing his essential Englishness, but he is said to have taken special pains with his articulation when he first came over here, for all that. Better articulation in a large and metaphorical sense is what we need for British documentary films which come to the U.S.A.

Finally, when the producer has solved all his problems, the distributor of international-relations films will be faced with a new one in the post-war world. He will have to discover how to do his job in a way which is acceptable to the American 16 mm. trade. America is still the land in which "free enterprise" is a phrase that commands more respect than "government". John Grierson has recently written:

> "A government's use of educational films is not 'propaganda' in the ordinary sense. Certainly we cannot impose on a government the duty of planning the national effort without giving it the means of informing the people what it is doing and of obtaining their support. This is generally admitted today in every country except the United States, where, or so it appears to the outsider, the fear of the partisan political use of information services looms very large in the public argument."

The exception is a crucial one for us, and the part played by governments in the future production and international exchange of films is one which will call for the nicest adjustments in relations with the United States.

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# FEDERATION FOR FILM SOCIETIES

**By H. Forsyth Hardy**

SEVERAL attempts have been made over the fifteen years to form a federation of film societies. I recall a conference at Leicester in, I think, 1933. It began bright with promise and ended dully with something like despair after hour after hour had been talked away. Disappointed by the absence of any spirit of unity, the Scottish societies went off and formed their own Federation which has maintained since then a sturdy growth and has been a source of stimulus to the movement in the North.

Again there is talk of federation in the air, and it seems likely that there will emerge an organisation similar to Scotland's for England and Wales, with perhaps a Joint Committee for combined action when necessary. I believe that there is a strong case for both the federation and the committee. A federation for societies in England and Wales will bring immediate benefits and a general strengthening of the movement. Co-operation with the Scottish Federation would enable certain services to be operated which would be possible only if all the societies acted together.

To consider first the narrow issue: what can a federation do? Some of the results achieved by the Federation of Scottish Film Societies were recently set out by Norman Wilson, Chairman of the Edinburgh Film Guild:—

> It has set up a centralised booking system, first through its own booking agent in London and latterly through the British Film Institute.
>
> It has provided for all its constituent societies an information service and, by means of its quarterly meetings held in rotation in different parts of the country, an exchange of ideas and experience.
>
> It has obtained direct representation (with three delegates) on the Scottish Film Council, the co-ordinating organisation under the British Film Institute for film activities in Scotland.
>
> It has been able to speak on behalf of all societies and on occasion has negotiated with the trade, both renters and exhibitors, on behalf of its constituent members.
>
> It has held annual previews (before the war in London, at present in Glasgow) so that societies might have an opportunity of viewing suitable films.
>
> It has assisted societies in difficulties and has stimulated the formation of new societies.
>
> It has published its own organ, *Film Forum*, with a service of information on features and shorts.

It is reasonable to suggest that if these services were offered by a federation to film societies in England and Wales, similar results would be achieved. Federation does not mean the loss of independence nor the imposition of control from the centre. Each film society is free to adapt itself to the needs of the community it serves. The whole basis is one of mutual assistance in the achievement of a common aim.

I believe that, with a Federation of Film Societies in England and Wales, the movement will rapidly regain the impetus it had in the pre-war years. I understand that at present the total number of film societies south of the Border is only about a score. There are dozens of cities and towns which ought to be able to support flourishing societies. A federation would not attempt to force the formation of a society on a community; but it would make certain that any organisation struggling into being received advice and assistance at the moment these were most needed.

With organisations operating on both sides of the Border, certain efforts could be made on a joint basis. There are questions such as Entertainment Tax and negotiations with trade organisations where it would be an advantage if the film society movement could speak with one voice. The movement is now almost twenty years old: it can reasonably claim recognition as something more than a passing phase.

The chief benefit which would come from joint action, however, would be the means to improve the film supply position. In the early days of the movement the London Film Society acted as an agent for the import of experimental work from many parts of the world. Some of the films were subsequently shown at the specialised cinemas but this was not a necessary condition for their importation. Now there is no organisation doing this work. Joint action by strongly established federations in England and Scotland would make it possible to resume the importing of *avant-garde* films with an interest for film societies.

During the war the field for search is limited; but later there should be no tendency to confine it to France and Russia. Some of the most spirited and individualistic work has come out of Sweden and Holland and Czechoslovakia in the past—and may come again. Mexico and the Latin American countries are producing films of which we see nothing in this country. No films reach us from China and India. The most successful French and Russian films will continue to come into this country through channels now well established; but for the others it will not be enough for the societies to stand and wait.

The film society movement is at a turning point in its development. There is a real opportunity, through combined action, for a strong step forward.

# *Film Society News*

**Edinburgh Film Guild** opened the second part of the season with a programme devoted to life in Holland. The twentieth century was represented by *New Earth*, *Tulips Shall Grow* and *The Dutch Tradition*, followed by the period comedy *La Kermesse Heroique*. A later programme was specially composed to the theme of Dance and Ballet in Films and included *Dance of the Harvest*, *Kathak* and a ballet sequence from *Dance Pretty Lady*. *Steel* and *Out of Chaos* were shown with *The Forgotten Village* at the March performance.

**Belfast Film Institute** has shown Capra's *Battle of Russia* with *The Forgotten Village* and *Le Jour Se Leve* and *Out of Chaos* for their last two repertory shows of the season.

**Irish Film Society's** Monthly Bulletin announces that five programmes have been booked, including *Film and Reality*, *Song of Ceylon*, *Children of the City*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the *Last Laugh* and *Mother*, with lectures on films criticism and film-making completing their plans for the first season.

**Dundee and St. Andrews Film Society** has shown *Battle of Britain* and *Blue Angel*, and for the last performance of the season, Duvivier's *Heart of a Nation* and *Some Like it Rough*.

**Manchester and Salford Society** has supplemented its 1945 programmes with Film Forum discussions on "Film amd Film Societies", "Freedom of the Screen" and "Future Policy and Programme." The second opened with an address by Ellis Smith, M.P.

**SCIENTIFIC FILM ASSOCIATION**

The Scientific Film Association has now opened a branch in the North of England under the secretaryship of Mr. John Maddison, Creskeld Villas, Arthington, near Leeds. Scientific film societies have been, or are being, started in Leeds, Doncaster, Sheffield, Manchester, Huddersfield and Hull. In Leeds special medical film shows are being organised, and the local branch of N.A.T.K.E. is considering running Sunday morning shows of scientific films for their members.

# *Correspondence*

*Alberto Cavalcanti has received the following letter from J. Bellini who, having created in pre-Fascist days a Documentary Film Company in Italy, made for his first production a most remarkable and moving account of the peasant pilgrimage in the Abruzzi Mountains:—*

DEAR CAVALCANTI,

I wanted to answer your letter before but could not do so.

I met Pat Jackson who had begun telling me about the important development of documentary in England when we were interrupted by his departure. So for me the picture remains incomplete; yet not quite so much as to keep away one doubt from me. Is documentary, throughout so many evolutions, drifting from its original nature? My fear is probably due to my deep love for G.P.O. documentary—or perhaps to a kind of "stiffness" one gets after so many years of waiting and silence.

I would like to tell you about what is going on over here. There is confusion and, after the acquisition of liberty—the gift which was offered us after twenty years of suppression—very little liberality. But it would be all too long and difficult to put in a letter. I will tell you more about it when we meet again.

Meanwhile my friends and I are anxious to do all that we can to arouse an interest in documentaries among the Italian public. We should be most grateful for any advice or help that you can give.

Documentaries—in the widest sense of the word—have been ignored over here. For years all that we were shown were Italian and German propaganda films: never anything from any other country. My own little documentary* was suppressed immediately after its Venice showing and is still lying and waiting.

Our native industry has reached a crisis. During the Fascist régime economic and political privilege and the abnormal situation of markets alone made its existence possible. Since the liberation, foreign films, chiefly American, have reappeared on the market. Italian documentaries and shorts have been forbidden and—with the single exception of newsreels—not even foreign documentaries are shown. At the very beginning the P.W.B. made one or two documentaries and, I understand, has others in course of preparation besides some special documentaries about political events which are not to be shown to our public. Could it be possible

**Peasant Pilgrimage.*

## Correspondence *(continued)*

that P.W.B., being an exponent of American and British interests, is planning a development aimed at stifling the growth of a new Italian industry?

In the circumstances it will be clear to you as it is to us that now is the right moment for action on the basis of what I have mentioned. It is our belief and purpose that "documentary" must finally succeed in asserting itself as something of its own—a separate branch with a quite different function from that of the commercial film. Once and for ever it should be dissociated from the commercial film and thereby from the customary wrong valuation and wrong treatment on the part of distributors and exhibitors.

Such an enterprise requires clear ideas, constancy of purpose and the capacity for choosing and preparing good films. It calls for the establishment of an efficient system of distribution and steady and regular assistance from those who support it financially.

I can assert that "documentary", as we interpret it, would help to satisfy the present tendencies of our public and its aspirations, long concealed, towards every manifestation of superior taste and expression of a better social and moral order. This is proved by the deep interest aroused by some parts of newsreels typically documentary. A much smaller interest, to my idea, was given to American films which had been anxiously awaited during the last six years. On the other hand the long Dovzchenko documentary *Battle of the Ukraine* had a tremendous success, in spite of all that was done to diminish the importance of the sound track.

The success of our group today would lead to more favourable conditions for the documentary production of tomorrow, when we hope to be able to begin a new creative activity. On practical grounds it would be desirable, for the most efficient working of our plan, to use two different organisations:

(*a*) A distributing organisation charged with choosing and collecting documentaries, particularly many beautiful and memorable films made before the war and absolutely ignored by Fascist Italy.

(*b*) An exhibiting organisation to take over cinemas in every large town in Italy, beginning with Rome, the programme of which would be composed only of documentaries. In other words the creation of a documentary circuit.

The distributing organisation would be the small society which produced my own documentary and which is now ready to plan all the agreements required for the first phase of this kind of work. The success of the second organisation would be dependent upon the efficient functioning of the first.

It is clear to us that great success cannot be expected right from the beginning, but we are firmly convinced that we shall end by achieving our aims—*given the necessary help and encouragement by those who are in the position to give it.*

And this is why I write. Great Britain, more than any other nation, is at the head of documentary development—and I cannot think of a better person than yourself to collaborate with us, to present our case to documentary sympathisers over there. I would wish this collaboration to be an artistic, financial and a technical one.

Will you help?

Yours,

*Italy* G. BELLINI


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**has been formed by the Companies and Units listed below in order to pool their resources and make available the best possible film-production service to Government Departments and to Industry.**

***The principles upon which the Guild has been formed are :—***

**1** That films can play a great part in post-war world rehabilitation, *but* to play their part effectively such films must be of unquestioned integrity and of the highest technical quality.

**2** That such films are best made by small units of experienced technicians, specialising in the type of film for which they are best fitted and believing whole-heartedly in the value of their work.

**3** That these units, however enthusiastic, cannot function properly without adequate technical facilities and financial stability.

**4** That since such technical facilities are beyond the resources of small units, the key to efficient film production is the establishment of a co-ordinated group of individual production units, *each retaining its freedom of expression*, but sharing in the financial stability and physical resources of a large organisation.

*The Guild's personnel of upwards of 130 principal technicians includes Producers, Directors, Writers, Cameramen and Editors, each with his own individual viewpoint and specialised experience: these are supported by first-class business organisation and have at their command the facilities and permanent technical staff of the Studios operated by Merton Park Studios Ltd.*

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*New Documentary Films* (*contd. from p.* 64)

to get back health and strength to return to work.

The third item, Itma, needs no introduction. The shooting is stagey, quite rightly so, and the only comment came from my neighbour at the showing—"We could do with another reel of that".

*Propaganda Value:* By now these magazines must be the God-sent standby for all regional officers. They carry out extremely well a function indispensable in war and peace, that of relating the machine operator to the users of his product.

**Kathak.** *Production:* Information Films of India. *Director:* Modhu Bhose. *Editor:* Pratap Parmar. *Producer:* Ezra Mir. 10 minutes. N.T.

*Subject:* Kathakali dancing.

*Treatment:* The film opens with a brief sequence showing the way in which the hands of an Indian dancer play an important part in the development of the dance itself. Then we see two or three sequences of different sections of traditional dances. The dancer is extremely good and the direction as excellent as one would expect from this celebrated Indian director. The film is enormously helped by an excellent commentary, the speaker of which has one of the best commentary voices we have heard for a long time. The description successfully avoids the arch approach we have learnt by bitter experience to associate with any such activities as dancing and has not fallen into the error of over enthusiasm. Simply and lucidly it illuminates what is going on on the screen and makes the highly stylised dancing as sensible and exciting as it really is.

Skilful editing helps the film to make its points and only the poor camera-work detracts from the pleasure one has in seeing this film.

*Propaganda Value:* Excellent. We could do with a lot more films like this which present to us exotic things as being reasonable and not part of the theatrical mumbo-jumbo of the Mysterious East.

**Cornish Valley.** Green Park Productions. *Direction and Script:* Ralph Keene. *Camera:* Peter Hennessy. *Associate Producer:* Edgar Anstey. 17 minutes. N-T.

*Subject:* Life in a small Cornish valley.

*Treatment:* What a pleasure it is to look at a film by Keene. As a director he never comes between the subject and the audience and yet how skilfully he carries one's eyes across the country. Shot follows impeccable shot and before our eyes Cornwall comes to life. There is a warmth in his handling of people too, which is all too, seldom met with.

We see the lives of two or three families of farmers, what they do, how they live. And, in an opening sequence, this is set against a general background of Cornwall. In helping to show us this small valley, the quality of the camera work matches the skill of the direction. It is a great pity that the producer has not yet managed to find a commentary style and speaker to match his director's work. This film is partly commented by the people of the valley themselves. As they move about their work in farm and field each one takes up his or her part of the story. Their voices are clear and understandable, but their continual surprise at their own daily doings is most tiresome and they have a regrettably knowing style of speaking.

*Propaganda Value:* Excellent. Another part of England comes to life under Keene's camera and takes its place in his smooth pattern of Britain.

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